

Proposed legislation to direct corps

Jenkins house to get spruced up

Federal legislation will allow restoration of famous Civil-War era tourist attraction

Editor's Note: The following is published at the permission of the Herald Dispatch.

By DAVE WELLMAN

GREENBOTTOM—An historic Cabell County structure apparently is about to receive the restoration many say it deserves and needs.

Legislation sponsored by U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall, D-W.Va., was approved Thursday by the House of Representatives assuring that the Jenkins House located off West Virginia 2 near the Cabell-Mason county line be preserved and restored.

"What a great day," said Ned Jones, president of the Greenbottom Society, which has sought such legislation for about a dozen years. "This historic site will finally become the attraction that we all felt it could be."

The legislation passed the house as part of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, and now must be reconciled with a Senate version before final approval.

The Jenkins House was the home of Civil War General Albert Gallatin Jenkins, and is a Cabell County tourist attraction. It was built in 1835 and rehabilitated by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1992.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the house is on federal property under the jurisdiction of the Corps of Engineers, which leases it to the state.

The legislation compels the Corps to insure the preservation and restoration of the Jenkins House or be in violation of federal law, Rahall said. The house's structural integrity, Jones said is rapidly deteriorating.

"Certainly over the years the Greenbottom Society has experienced a great deal of frustration in its dealing with both the Corps of Engineers and the state

"While I think the Corps' heart has been in the right place, I do not believe it has given this project the priority it deserves."

Nick Rahall, D-W.Va.

on this historic property," Rahall said. "While I think the Corps' heart has been in the right place, I do not believe it has given this project the priority it deserves."

The plantation was part of the Corps purchase of the home and 836 acres of farmland to replace waterfowl habitat destroyed by the Gallipolis Locks and Dam expansion.

Greenbottom Society Vice President Karen Nance said the legislation is "a good step."

"Maybe this will give (the Corps) the push they needed," she said.

The Jenkins House became a part of the West Virginia Division of Culture and History after it was rehabilitated by the Corps of Engineers. The Division has maintained that the Corps' work was not completed in a satisfactory manner, while the Greenbottom Society has sought the restoration of the house to reflect its historic character.

"Congressman Rahall heard our pleas and his response was all that we could have hoped for," Jones said. "Congressman Rahall's legislation will not only immediately stabilize this historic home, but it will require that it be restored to its original grandeur."

Nance said the house's floors are in poor shape and it has brick and plaster damage.

"I'm happy because of the fact that (the Corps) will have to do something," she said.

There is a

By STEVE WRIGHT
Public Affairs

The Greenbottom Society article is from the Oct. 20 issue of the Huntington Herald Dispatch. The Jenkins House being discussed in the article is located in West Virginia 20 miles northeast of Huntington on State Route 2. The Corps of Engineers acquired the Jenkins House with 836 acres of land adjacent to the Ohio River to mitigate for land being disturbed by the Gallipolis, now Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam construction project.

The house was the residence of Albert Gallatin Jenkins, a two-term U.S. Congressman from Virginia prior to the Civil War, a member of the Confederate Congress and a Confederate General in the Civil War. Jenkins was wounded and died of complications of that wound in 1864.

The Greenbottom land and house have been a source of intermittent controversy since the corps acquired it in 1988. After we gained occupancy of the house, it and the land were leased to the W.Va. Department of Natural Resources for management. The DNR resident manager occupied the house and the DNR opened the land to public hunting.

Hunting and DNR occupancy of the house soon became a public issue with significant media coverage. Bird watchers, Marshall students who used Greenbottom as an outdoor biology laboratory and archeological dig site, and those who wanted the Jenkins House as a museum aligned against the hunters, DNR and indirectly the corps, since we owned the house and leased it to the DNR.

Citizens said that hunting passed a danger to those using the site for non hunting purposes and there was a concern about use of rifles on a narrow land strip bordered by the Ohio River and a well-used state highway. Many of the objections to hunting were overcome when the DNR restricted hunting to shotguns,

to restore Jenkins house

history behind house controversy

muzzle loading rifles and bow and arrows.

Other objections were overcome when, under a 1988 sub-lease agreement, the DNR turned over occupancy of the Jenkins House to the W.Va. Department of Culture and History in 1996. Since that time the house has been open to the public for viewing and interpretation. The house is currently open to the public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Wed., Thurs. and Sat.

Recently the Jenkins House was the subject of legislation sponsored by Congressman Rahall that directs the Secretary of the Army to ensure the preservation and restoration of the Jenkins House in accordance with the standards for sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The National Register standards for restoration state, "Restoration. The act or process of accurately recovering the form and details of a property and its setting as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of later work or by the replacement of missing earlier work."

In short, restoring the Jenkins House would return it to its former state at a specific point in history. For example, this could mean restoring the house to its state in 1860 before the Civil War. This may be a formidable task in that the district archeologist Dr. Bob Maslowski says that little of the original interior finishes of the house remains.

Karen Nance, who is quoted in the newspaper article, is the Vice President of the Greenbottom Society, a group that began with a broad interest base, but is now primarily interested in the preservation and restoration of the Jenkins House. Nance, who is affiliated with a general building contractor specializing in historic preservation, developed a \$2.2 million preliminary estimate of costs and work to stabilize, restore and reconstruct a Jenkins Plantation

Museum. This estimate includes funding for archaeological and historical research and engineering and architectural studies/plans; stabilization to protect structures and plantings from moisture; restoration of the historic plantation's landscape and camouflage modern intrusions, such as the wetlands created by the Corps; restoring the historic structure to its historic period; reconstruct plantation outbuildings; and reconstruct a barn/stable for a visitor's center and underground railroad and slavery museum.

Nance suggests that the wetlands between the house and the Ohio River created by the corps to mitigate for the lock and dam construction should be relocated or at a minimum be moved at least 50 feet to the north. She points out that the wetlands are the source for the water well contamination and that a well should be dug across the road, away from the wetland contamination.

Among the out buildings she suggests constructing are a law office (Jenkins was an attorney), summer kitchen, icehouse, slave quarters, spring house, smoke house, privy and barn.

An obstacle to Nance's plan is that

the house and any outbuildings would be within the 100-year floodplain, therefore, any development would be subject to flooding as will the restoration of the Jenkins House itself. Another problem is relocating the wetland or moving the wetland further away from the Jenkins House would require an environmental impact statement and would adversely affect the mitigation purpose that Greenbottom was acquired for. A minor point in Nance's plan is the observation that the well is being contaminated by the wetland. The generally accepted knowledge is that wetlands act as a contamination filter and would eliminate contamination rather than contribute to it.

A final point, the news article conveys the wrong impression where it said that the Division of Culture and History maintained that the Corps work was not completed in a satisfactory manner. In fact, the Corps hired Culture and History to have rehabilitation plans and specs prepared and then gave them a contract for \$120,000 to rehabilitate the house. Culture and History awarded a contract to Cravens Construction for \$88,469 in June 1991 to do the rehabilitation.



Photo by Elizabeth Slagel
The Albert Jenkins house in 1997 when it was first being turned into a historical museum.